

The Watchman and Southern

RELIGION, MORALS AND PHILOSOPHY.

Rev. C. C. BROWN, Editor.

A WINTER SONG.

Summer has the roses,
And the laughing, light south wind,
And the merry meadows lined
With daisy, daisy, daisy,
But winter has the sprites
And the witching frosty nights.
Summer has the splendor
Of the cornfields wide and deep,
Where the scarlet poppies sleep
And the wheat is waving;
But winter has the snow
With diamonds every where.
Summer has the wild bees,
And the humming, singing note
In the robin's throatful throat,
And the jockey in the tree;
But winter has the chiming
Of the merry Christmas time.
Summer has the luster
Of the sunbeams warm and bright,
And the faint fall at night
Where the stars are shining;
But winter has the snow
The fire of Christmas glow.

Florida Islands.

In the January number of *Harper's Magazine* are some notes of Southern travel by Barnett Phillips, which we copy:

In the St. Lawrence there are the Thousand Islands. Whether they fall by one or two that complete roundness of ten times one hundred I do not know. On the southern end of the Gulf State there may be seen on the map a stretch called the Ten Thousand Islands. He was a very unimaginative person, niggardly, having a dread of exaggeration, who named these wonderful islands. He skimmed his nomenclature. There are not ten thousand islands; there must be a million of them, and more to spare, almost all of them covered with mangroves. To describe them were a difficult task. I may succeed, perhaps, in giving a faint idea of their number by asking the reader to think of one of those old mosaic floors the Romans delighted in. The infinite countless little bits of stone are the islands, the cement the water. Island after island appears emerging out of these blue bays. Some are but a few acres in size; then there are others with an area of several square miles. Now the channel between them is so narrow that a boat cannot pass, and then it expands to a mile wide. Beautiful silent harbors are entered, with peninsulas jutting into them, and behind comes labyrinth. It is an endless archipelago, all green and smiling. A man might hide himself here, provided he could only live, and remain uncaught forever; tracking him would be impossible. Only here and there on some of the islands is there the appearance of land, perceptible by a thin ridge. You can tell it by the hard wood growing on it. Centuries ago this island might have been on the sea front, and some storm threw up the sea bottom. Stretching then out in every direction, these intricate islands block the way. There may be eight, ten, or twenty miles to cross before the mainland would be reached—that is, if you had the wings of a man-of-war bird, and could fly. In a boat, working in and out among these mazes, you would have to row maybe one hundred miles; then finally you might fetch up on Florida proper. This would be that hazy country which little boys read about on their maps, spelling it out, "The Everglades," the "Ever" describing capriciously the constant appearance of a great deal of water, occasional hummocks the true home of the alligator, a God-forsaken region, where the saw-grass impedes progress.

We made a trip to Pine Island, which lies wedge-like parallel with the outer key. Here we found the coccolut and lemon trees, the branches laden down with magnificent fruit. Here we came across certain diminutive Robinson Crusoes which excited our sympathies. On this island, with a sad-looking and dilapidated father, lived four children. You approached the place through shallows barely navigable with a light draught boat at high tide. A ramshackle structure on rotten piles was the landing. This settlement was twenty miles from anywhere. The house, the size of a small stable, looked as if built years before, and was open to all the winds of heaven. As the winds, however, are never cold here, that perhaps was not important, but from April, as the very food-gates of heaven are open, that family must have been drowned out for months. Some time before, so we learned, while the father was absent, the mother died, and these poor bairns with their own hands dug a grave and buried their mother. How that family managed to eke out an existence God only knows. Shells of the gopher, the land tortoise, were strewn around, suggestive of miserable food. Fish, though, might have been plenty. Two grim dogs, lean and lank, slunk around the house. The master of these surroundings told us the dogs were only in good condition when alligators were plentiful. The house contained scarcely anything. There was a grimy table, and a few boxes serving as chairs. We saw not a cup or saucer; there were no beds. A tame crane, that did not seem to heed our presence, flopped around. That bird was a convincing proof that those little girls had bestowed their love on something, and this was their pet.

Fancy a lad of twelve having for a toy a squirming alligator some three feet long! Not a very lovable companion, nor one to be on intimate terms with. But it was the only thing the boy could find. Evidently it was something not to be fooled with, for the gator's jaws were bound with a bit of rag. At our request this ligature was loosed, when this ugly brute at once made for the boat of one of the party and fastened his teeth in it, and would not let go until his mouth was forced open. The children could read a little, and strange to say, the "Vicar of Wakefield" had been their horn-book. It was the only bound volume the father possessed. There were, though, as additions to the library, few tattered numbers of children's magazines of years long gone past. There was a slate, and at once the artistic young fellow stacked his gun, dropped his abridgment, and drew for the children pretty and funny pictures, until that poor, miserable house echoed again with laughter and cries of delight. The lad, instead of marbles,

played with the ugly fangs of the gator, and was himself the slayer of saurians. To judge from a miserable fire-arm we saw, belonging to the father, I should think the risk the boy ran was greater than that of the alligator. Then the misanthropist of the party, who often wondered why people ever wrote books or magazine stories, and was always amazed why people read them, made up his mind that that library on Pine Island should be increased, and if the mail facilities have not quite gone wrong, it is supposable that before this these children have a supply of juvenile literature sufficient to last them for some time to come.

A Happy New Year.

That 1885 should prove to be the most blessed twelfth-month yet experienced by us is God's wish, as well as that of our friends, for happiness is the chief jewel in the coronet with which he wishes to crown us. But his wish may mean sorrow as well as joy, since "Before honor cometh humility, and it is they that mourn that shall be comforted." It is out of the tears of the sky that rainbows are woven.

Sore afflictions often stand, like gates, between us and gladness. The best soils are composed of rocks which, by heat and frost and glacier and earthquake, have been ground to dust. Upon such fields are reaped the greatest grain crops grown on the whole cereal belt, and upon them stand the thickest grasses and tallest forests found in any zone. It may be that tribulation alone can pulverize our stubborn wills and worldly hearts and vain intellects into such soil as shall be able to produce the choicest fruits of the Spirit.

Perhaps, in order that this may be our happiest year, it must also be our saddest. As iron which is to be wrought into the finest cutlery lies first in the fire and on the anvil, so possibly, ere you or I can be shaped into a "vessel unto honor," we must first pass through the furnace, and have showered upon us, thick and hard, the blows of God's providential hammers.

Crucifixion precedes coronation, and if we shall experience this year what may seem to us God's cruellest judgments, it should comfort us to reflect that, quite likely, they are only preparing us to appreciate and receive some of His best gifts.

God earnestly wishes us all "a happy new year," and yet He will permit many of us to be overtaken by sorrow, sickness, bereavement and tears; for He desires that 1885 shall seem brightest when looked at from afar. It is said that our earth, when viewed from stellar standpoints, shines like a fixed and fiery star. Thus may it be with this New Year upon which we are entering. Its most painful experiences shall work out for us "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." It will present a very different appearance when gazed upon from the pinnacle of the centuries than it will while passing. We are not to be done with 1885 when it ends. We shall never be done with it. It and all our past years will affect us forever. As a burned child often brings its babyhood scars up into old age, and wears them beneath the whitening locks and deepening furrows of his evening time, so the joys and sorrows, the work and play, the sins and sanctities of all our ended years are helping to make or mar our present. This globe has been molded into what it now is, not by the physical phenomena of one year or century, but by all the rainfalls and whirlwinds, all the earthquakes and cataclysms, all the volcanic up-lifts and glacier gradings experienced by it through the unnumbered ages during which it has been journeying around the sun.

God, in wishing us "a happy New Year," does not mean one which, while passing, shall prove an unmixed delight, but one which, when all its prosperities and adversities, its sunshine and its shadows, have been exercising their molding influence upon our characters for hundreds and thousands of years, shall be pronounced, when looked back upon from eternity's discriminating standpoint, to have been one of our very best—one which, seen from afar, shines like a sun in the firmament.

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